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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE. NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/PASCUAL

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SUBJECT: CEC CHAIRMAN ON VOTER REGISTRATION, ELECTIONS, AND BUDGET

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶11. (C) Summary. Central Elections Commission (CEC) Chairman Hanna Nasir told USAID and Poloff February 27 that the CEC plans to launch a West Bank/Gaza voter registration drive in one month. Nasir said he fears Hamas will block the Ministry of Education from making Gaza schools available for voter registration. Noting PA President Mahmoud Abbas' (Abu Mazen) February 27 comments to the press about possible early presidential and PLC elections, Nasir said the CEC is prepared to conduct presidential elections 60 to 90 days after they are called and PLC elections in 90 to 120 days. He said the PA has not approved the CEC's three-year budget, and noted that the Ministry of Planning cut the CEC's request from USD 26 million to USD 16 million. End Summary.

Voter Registration Drive

¶12. (C) Central Elections Commission (CEC) Chairman Hanna Nasir and Chief Electoral Officer Hisham Kuhail told USAID and Poloff on February 27 that the CEC plans to launch a voter registration drive in the West Bank and Gaza in one month. According to the 2007 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics census, Nasir said, 82 percent of Palestinians in the West Bank and 75 percent in Gaza are registered voters. He recently discussed with Minister of Education Lamis al-Alami his fear that Hamas will block the Ministry of Education from making Gaza schools available for voter registration. Nasir added that a registration drive in Gaza would likely add 70,000 registered voters. He stressed that the CEC does not want to favor the West Bank or Gaza. The CEC must also maintain the perception among the Palestinian public that it is an absolutely independent body, free from government interference, he said.

Ready for Early Elections

¶13. (C) Noting PA President Mahmoud Abbas' (Abu Mazen) February 27 comments to the press about possible early presidential and PLC elections, Nasir said the CEC is prepared to hold presidential elections within 60 to 90 days and PLC elections within 90 to 120 days of their being called. He emphasized that it is difficult for the CEC to be "on stand-by."

Budget, Training, IT Upgrade

¶14. (C) Nasir said the PA has not yet approved the CEC's three-year USD 26 million budget, which includes costs for overhead and the organization of presidential, PLC, and municipal elections. If presidential and PLC elections are held simultaneously, Nasir said the budget will be USD 22

million. He noted that the Ministry of Planning cut the request to USD 16 million in the Palestinian Reform Development Plan.

¶5. (C) When an election date is set, Nasir said the CEC will hold two days of voter registration training across 16 districts for approximately 5,000 people at the cost of USD 300,000. He said the CEC strives to maintain a pool of 2,500 people who are up-to-date in voter registration technology. Nasir said the CEC is seeking USD 250,000 to update its computer hardware and wants to hire four technical experts, including a native English speaker.

WALLES